



WACSI EDITORIAL

10 SOCIAL IMPACT TIPS FOR START-UP CSOs

BY CHARLES KOJO VANDYCK



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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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10 Social Impact Tips for Start-up CSOs

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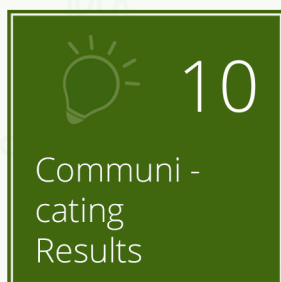
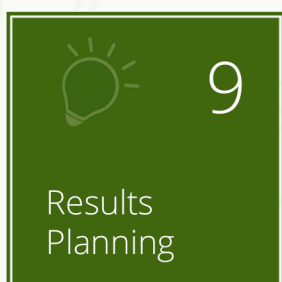
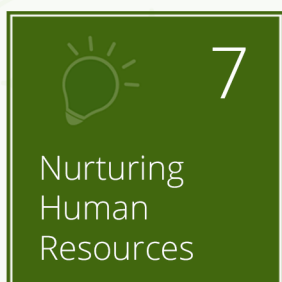
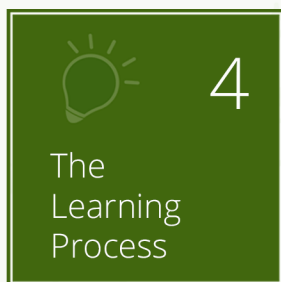
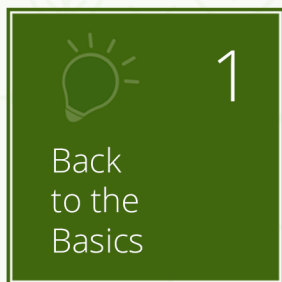
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SYNOPSIS

This editorial will help strengthen the operational sustainability specifically the governance and leadership of civil society including newly formed and emerging organisations. This resource is meant to be an easy-to-read reference to help strengthen actors, structures and systems of entities within the social impact ecosystem.

This editorial is a collection of practical experiences and learning from my experience working on strengthening civil society to improve and sustain their impact on society. It is also a reflection of my experiences in being an integral part of the growth and development of the West Africa Civil Society Institute (WACSI). I am humbled and honoured to share aspects of WACSI's story.

This editorial focuses on the importance of capacity development, institutional building, leadership, sustainability, knowledge and strategic management. This resource provides 10 pieces of guidance and experiential thoughts that will help enhance the performance of civil society organisations (CSOs) and sustain their operations especially in these turbulent and unpredictable times of resource constraints and restricted operational environments.

This knowledge product would be a valuable resource for traditional non-governmental organisations (NGOs), faith-based organisations, youth groups, women's organisations, community-based organisations, social enterprises, associations and loosely formed citizens groupings and associations.

FOREWORD

Throughout my professional career, I have engaged with individuals and organisations from civil society. Up until recently, I had been limited to the work of organisations focused on AIDS, tuberculosis and malaria. I have learnt about the challenges but most importantly, the commitment to transform lives of communities around us.

I became familiar with WACSI shortly after I relocated to Ghana. It has been a positive journey where we embraced knowledge creation as the medium by which we would try to make the needle move. Sharing knowledge is a critical part of human interaction. It provides the basis for engagement with a purpose. In seeking knowledge, Charles has compiled a series of articles that aim at changing the conversation within the civil society organisation community in West Africa and beyond.

This is an important contribution to the building blocks that are required to make African organisations strive for excellence in what they do and how they do it. Opportunities come knocking to those who are prepared and this guide provides a rich basis for furthering the conversation. It combines personal and institutional experiences that have shaped the way in which WACSI is establishing itself as a centre of excellence for civil society contribution to Africa's transformation.

Incremental change is resilient. Charles has demonstrated it in the guidance that he provides. He is committed to see West Africans lead the way in which

Civil Society Organisations transform lives and seek to transform themselves. It is not an easy task as civil society needs to carve a different space by being a strategic disruptor. As we evolve as a society, we ought to ensure that each citizen recognises his or her role as a member of the civil society and bears the responsibility of contributing to strengthening African civil society.

African private sector and employees have a role to play in resource allocation aimed at tackling issues that inhibit the acceleration of African transformation. One could imagine that with proper mechanisms and engagement on Illicit Financial Flows and tax reforms for example, civil society organisations would embrace issues that can unlock supplemental resources to enable prosperity. And this could be a significant disruptor if framed within knowledge and purpose.

My wish for Charles and the citizens that would read, is that they translate their learning into a civic duty to allow their neighbour, their community, their country, their region and their continent, Africa, to go farther everyday.

Kassi Carl Manlan
COO, Ecobank Foundation

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Tip 1

Back to the Basics

The phrase 'back to the basics' is a stark reminder of the importance of enhancing capacity. Capacity strengthening is the basic foundational pillar that ensures the viability of an organisation. Interestingly, we often must be reminded of the importance of building our organisation's capacity.

Just like in the business sphere, CSOs are formed with the intention of operating successfully and sustainably. The only difference is that the formation of CSOs is often driven by a social need or a community problem instead of a profit motive. Therefore, capacity development is essential to ensure that CSOs do not only survive but also thrive.

What does capacity development mean?

The concept of capacity development originated in the 1990's when an international conference on environment and development observed that institutions had inadequate competency to resolve problems and evolve to meet changing demands. As a result, the term capacity development came about to address three dimensions.

- (1) Human capacity: This encompasses the education and training of individuals in the use and development of products and services;
- (2) Organisation capacity: This refers to the development of organisational policies, procedures, programmes and structure to ensure effectiveness and enhancement of products and services; and
- (3) Infrastructure capacity: This is related to the way in which an organisation accesses, uses and develops their products and services, for instance, technology and facilities.

These 3 dimensions provide a basis for a definition of capacity development within the context of organised civil society.

Capacity development may be defined as a planned and comprehensive strategy to enhance the effectiveness, viability and capability of an organisation to adequately respond to community challenges. The effectiveness of a CSO is the measure of how well an organisation is doing the right things to accomplish its purpose. It is determined by whether an organisation has the right framework and is following the right approach to achieve its core objective. The viability of a CSO can be defined as its ability to survive or sustain itself for a long period of time.

In essence, the term capacity development is not a new concept, but a refinement of previous approaches combined to address different aspects within a CSO to ensure effectiveness and viability.

Addressing a CSOs' capacity needs means committing to the long-term examination of different aspects of the organisation. Hence, all aspects of the organisation that would influence performance are examined. This includes the CSO's resources, structure, relationships, processes, procedures and culture. At the heart of capacity development are resources and activities designed to advance a CSO's ability to deliver programmes as well as adapt, expand and innovate.

Also, there are some vital elements that harness an organisation's efficiency and enhance its capacity to garner needed resources for its long-term viability. These elements are components of a capacity development framework.

What is a capacity building framework?

Conceptually, a capacity development framework identifies key aspects a CSO needs to consider in identifying what is required to become sustainable. These include; (1) Purpose; (2) Strategies; (3) Skills; (4) Resources; (5) Structure and operations (6) Infrastructure; (7) Partnerships and stakeholder engagement; (8) Products and services; and (9) Monitoring and evaluation.

This proposed framework is a generic consideration of capacity development that should be examined to improve on the effectiveness and viability of a CSO. When exploring a specific organisation's capacity development framework, consideration should be given to requirements that reflect the context of the organisation. This framework helps an organisation to determine the various elements that can shape its capacity development strategy. The following are recommended steps to define a CSOs' capacity development strategy.

Defining a capacity development strategy ?

- (1) Define needs and resources of the CSO: The first step in developing a capacity development strategy is to undertake an assessment of the CSO's needs and available resources. The purpose of this step is to identify the organisation's weaknesses and strengths.
- (2) Review the CSO's capacity gaps: This step involves reviewing all the elements of a CSO to assess how well the available resources meet the needs of the organisation. The purpose of this step is to determine a match or mismatch between needs and resources.
- (3) Perform a systems and infrastructure analysis: The purpose of this step is to determine whether the organisation has the current procedures, processes, facilities and other systems in place to foster a capacity development process within the organisation.
- (4) Develop a capacity development plan: This process will depend on the results of what the systems and infrastructure analysis revealed. The results would dictate how the CSO would tailor the strategy based on the needs and readiness to implement a capacity development strate-

gy. If the results reveal that the CSO lacks the capacity to proceed, they will need to solicit technical assistance from civil society support organisations like WACSI.

- (5) Monitor and periodically evaluate progress of the plan: This process involves monitoring and assessing progress to obtain on-going feedback and opportunities to adjust and improvements to the plan if necessary.

These steps are recommendations on how a CSO can proceed as they seek to develop a capacity development plan. When developing a specific CSO capacity development plan, the organisation should consider requirements that are contextual and should be developed in alignment with the realities they find themselves in.

Capacity development seeks to add value to existing and future organisational activities. It is central to the sustainability of a CSO, which is intended to guide it to a model of effectiveness and viability.

In developing a capacity development plan, it is important to build on what exists (organisation's strengths) to ensure that capacity development by the CSO is successful and actually achieves the outcomes that it plans to accomplish.

Successful implementation also depends on building on existing efforts and practices, focusing on user needs and fostering collaborations and partnerships.

A CSO would begin to see the gains of capacity development efforts by purposefully investing in the implementation of its capacity development plan. This should then lead to a more efficient, effective, influential and sustainable organisation.

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Tip 2

Continuous Capacity Development

For a significant number of years, I have been privileged to play a role in the institutional growth of WACSI. This experience has been a significant learning trajectory, which has given me the opportunity to be deeply involved in the institute's capacity planning strategy. 'Capacity planning', is the process of being conscious of, and taking active steps to proactively strengthen an organisation's potential/ability to respond to its growing needs, or, respond to the challenges it seeks to address.

At WACSI, capacity planning is an ongoing process of determining the resources needed to meet the constantly growing and changing demands for the institute's products and services.

Closely linked to this is its delivery capacity. This is the maximum amount of work that WACSI is capable of completing efficiently and effectively over a given period.

The Institute's focus on capacity planning has contributed to its achievements and globally recognised performance. The lesson here is that the short, medium and long-term effects of strengthening internal capacity can only bear fruit if it is linked with the organisation's mandate. For example, the attainment of WACSI's mandate is a collective achievement of the goals set by all the sections (called units at WACSI) of the Institute.

To help achieve this purpose, defined goals are set and communicated within the Institute. These form the basis of unit objectives, and ultimately, objectives for staff. The methods used to achieve these organisational objectives and subsequently the organisational purpose form the basis of WACSI's strategy cycle.

The WACSI experience teaches us that there is a clear connection between an organisation's strategy and its strength. Hence, a well-defined strategy that is well implemented can result in a robust organisation.

Therefore, organisations should prioritise the education and training of its staff as a means of enhancing its overall performance. This is because, empowering staff would adequately equip and prepare them to effectively handle their roles and responsibilities which stand as vital ingredients required to accomplish the objectives outlined in the organisation's strategy in a holistic fashion.

In addition, since these roles and responsibilities contribute to the implementation of the organisation's strategy, its management should review internal capacity development objectives and programmes periodically. This can specifically be done when a major change in strategy is planned. This enables the organisation to adequately adapt to the rapidly changing circumstances it could be faced with.

These developments are applicable equally to broader aspects of capacity development and indicate that capacity development plans should be related closely to organisational strategy and built into a staff development and capacity planning policy.

This policy should describe in detail the organisation's commitment to develop internal capacity, the needs of the organisation and staff members, together with opportunities for individual development. Also included should be details of budgeting, priorities, roles and processes.

The assessment of capacity needs should be crosscutting within the organisation. It should apply to vertical and horizontal structures within the organisation. It should involve the management team or senior personnel rather than being driven by an individually oriented bottom-up process. There is less likelihood of conflict or incompatibility between objectives when they are generated from the top of an organisation.

Global experiences within the civil society sector seem to lend support to the preceding argument. At WACSI, we fully support this assertion and believe that staff development plans should be constructed in the same context and by the same process as the organisational strategic plan and viewed in direct relation to it.

Over the long-term, capacity planning within the civil society sector should relate primarily to strategic issues involving an organisation's services and products. In addition, long-term capacity issues should be closely linked with strategic decisions and the efficient use of human, material and financial resources.

A failure to understand the critical nature of managing capacity can lead to chaos and serious service delivery challenges. However, it should be noted that CSOs will continue to struggle to have perfectly balanced capacity plans that easily respond to external changes. Therefore, a CSO's competitive priority should be its flexibility and continuous quest for an absorptive capacity – its ability to adapt to and resolve existing and emerging challenges.

IN A NUTSHELL:

"organisations should prioritise the education and training of its staff as a means of enhancing its overall performance"

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Tip 3

Managing the Transfer of Knowledge

My colleagues and I continue to debate the most effective way of ensuring that the skills, knowledge and behavioral modeling trainees receive during our trainings can be transferred and institutionalised. This is an issue that we have continuously reflected on in our quest to provide training programmes that give high value for money.

We are very conscious of the scarcity of funds within the development sector, and recognise that a critical concern for civil society organisations (CSOs) and their development partners is that investments in trainings would not become a waste.

The challenge with some bespoke training programmes is that the organisers invest more in marketing and branding than the actual customisation and delivery of the programmes. Most of these programmes provide useful information and knowledge but fall short on relevance and specificity.

Hence, the knowledge and skills acquired through such training programmes may not be fully applied when trainees return to their place of work. Another key challenge is the lack of involvement of supervisors and lack of reinforcement on the job, which are major barriers to the transfer of training.

These suggest that it is imperative that the training process is managed effectively, before, during and after the training has taken place. Knowledge transfer and reinforcement is a multi-dimensional relationship between the trainer, trainee and the supervisor.

At WACSI, a key component of our long-term capacity development model is a transfer partnership between the trainee, trainer and supervisor. The terms of the partnership are established prior to the implementation of the training programme.

A compilation of transfer strategies that might potentially be employed by the three parties involved in the transfer process is articulated below:

IMMEDIATE SUPERVISOR

Pre-training

Plays an active role in the development of and transfer of training of staff one supervises. Ensures relevant staff members attend the required course. In some cases sends two or more staff to create a critical mass on the return to work.

During training

Ensures the trainee is not interrupted during the training. Allocates the trainee's workload to other employees for the duration of the programme so that he or she does not return to face large amount of work that is outstanding.

Post-training

Provides the trainee with an early opportunity to put into practice the skills and knowledge learned during the training programme. Allows the trainee to brief others about the training programme. Moving from trainee to trainer can often deepen an individual's understanding of what has been learned.

TRAINEE

Pre-training

Ensures he or she fills the learning needs analysis. Reviews any pre-course material like course briefs and brochures and raise questions with the trainer and immediate supervisor (if the need be).

During training

Keeps ideas and applications notebook for the duration of the training. Draws up an action plan consisting of specific and assessable objectives to be worked towards after the completion of the programme.

Post-training

Develops a mentoring relationship to help to critically evaluate the application of knowledge and skills acquired during the training.

TRAINER

Pre-training

Designs the programme by following a systematic approach. Develop a peer-coaching component for post-course application of knowledge and skills.

During training

Encourages trainees to actively think through how they would perform if they carried out their tasks employing the knowledge and skills learned during training. Provides trainees with job aids for example, checklists during the instructional phases of the training, which can then act as memory reminders in the workplace.

Post-training

Visits former trainees and act as facilitators in their efforts to apply their new knowledge and skills. Sets up and runs on-site coaching sessions to reinforce learning.

In conclusion, managing the transfer of knowledge is the practical process of transferring knowledge between the trainee, trainer and supervisor throughout the organisation. Like knowledge management, knowledge transfer seeks to organise, create, capture or distribute knowledge and ensure its availability for future users.

IN A NUTSHELL:

“Knowledge transfer and reinforcement is a multi-dimensional relationship between the trainer, trainee and the supervisor.”

“A key challenge is the lack of involvement of supervisors and lack of reinforcement on the job, which are major barriers to the transfer of training.”

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Tip 4

The Learning Process

When I began working at WACSI, I was very much interested in redefining attitudes and perceptions about capacity development. I was determined to minimise the skepticism about capacity development. To achieve this, I sought a better understanding of what capacity development is.

I came to understand that, capacity development is a process by which skills, institutions and knowledge are built, utilised, retained and nurtured with a view to provide an entity with the means/capability of responding to a development challenge.

The two components that are vital to make this attainable are human resource skills, which are reflected in the ability to perform a task; and institutions, which comprise of the effectiveness and efficiency of organisations, systems, processes and procedures.

I have also come to realise that at the heartbeat of capacity development is the learning process. It is therefore important to note that in developing instructional methods and designing capacity development programmes, the resource person must be primarily concerned with the needs of the beneficiaries of his or her intervention and the impact they will have on the ease with which the target recipients acquire new knowledge and skills.

If resource persons are going to be able to shape the capacity development environment in a way that is conducive to learning, then, they need more than a superficial and a passing acquaintance with the principles and conditions of learning.

From our experiences at WACSI, we have concluded that the learning process is strongly influenced by the following factors:

- ☐ Sequencing the learning objectives;
- ☐ Readiness of the learner;
- ☐ Learning conditions;

- ☐ Influence of the themes to be learned; and
- ☐ Individual differences.

Sequencing the learning objectives

An often-neglected consideration when a capacity development programme is being designed is the sequence in which the learning objectives should be approached. The ordering of certain kinds of capacity development methods will make a critical difference to the ease of learning.

There would be the need to determine the sequence of capacity development needs of the recipient individual and/or organisation. There could also be the need for training and technical assistance. In other cases, technical assistance, monitoring and evaluation support may be needed.

Readiness of the learner

Several factors influence the learner's readiness to learn. Their basic capacity for learning in general and the specific aptitudes or trainability in respect of certain forms of capacity strengthening content is critical. Equally important will be the trainees' initial and on-going levels of motivation. These may be affected by their needs, previous background and experiences and current emotional and physical states.

Learning conditions

The resource person needs to be aware of the ways in which people learn and how conditions of learning can be arranged to aid the learning process. The resource person must know how the organisation of the learning process and actions will positively influence the attainment of the capacity development objectives. In addition, the conditions that facilitate transfer of learning and prevent or reduce poor understanding and skill loss also must be identified.

Influence of the themes to be learned

Closely linked with learning conditions is the influence that the themes to be learned should have on the arrangement and organisation of the learning conditions.

Individual differences

There are several individual capabilities that have an important impact on the process of learning. Apart from certain differences such as intelligence, aptitudes, age and previous learning experiences, in recent years other differences have been seen to have an important bearing on the ease of learning. These include personality factors and individual learning styles.

IN A NUTSHELL:

“At the heartbeat of capacity development is the learning process.”

“The learning process is strongly influenced by the following factors: Sequencing the learning objectives; Readiness of the learner; Learning conditions; Influence of the themes to be learned; and Individual differences.”

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Tip 5

Thriving in Complex Times

Our work at WACSI has given us the opportunity to critically analyse attitudes towards the process of learning and development within the civil society sector. The focus on learning is essential for CSOs because it is a key aspect that determines their sustainability.

In order to survive, prosper and remain valuable, CSOs will need to respond in a timely and flexible way to social, technological, economic and political changes. This means CSOs' survival and growth will depend on the ability to cope with the external and internal requirements that the changes will demand.

To achieve this, existing and new staff members of CSOs will need to acquire new knowledge, skills, attitudes and perspectives on a continual basis. Therefore, CSOs need to become learning organisations. The concept of a learning organisation is based on the premise that "You cannot give what you do not have".

Many actors are skeptical about the concept and have questioned whether it exists at all. However, my experiences working within this sector have confirmed the importance of this concept.

For over ten years, I have been privileged to engage with a significant number of CSOs from across Africa. These experiences have helped shape my understanding of a learning organisation. A learning organisation is one that can be seen to possess one or more of the following characteristics:

- They facilitate the learning of their members and continuously transform themselves;
- Organisational and individual learning is seen as critical to their survival and development; and
- They continually expand their capacity to create their own future.

Learning organisations recognise the need for change and actively pursue it. This is reflected in their organisational vision and strategic objectives, which are communicated to, and shared by, its members at all levels. I am convinced that for an organisation to realise its strategic objectives and ultimately its vision, the senior management team and the governing board should be committed to the concept of a learning organisation.

The way to achieve this commitment is to comprehensively provide resources and opportunities including appropriate rewards for learning, materials, time, support and empowerment.

The implementation of the concept would mean that members of the organisation would need to develop a new perspective on the way in which they work, their status, their working relationships and their openness. What this means is that, "they have to play an active role in adjusting their perspectives and actions in alignment to the organisational culture".

Roles and responsibilities of staff members

In this new culture, individuals would be expected to take greater responsibility for their own development by identifying their training needs and setting themselves challenging learning objectives. Staff members should be encouraged to learn regularly and rigorously from their work experience and to seek out opportunities away from the workplace that provide new experiences.

This learning should be supported by regular reviews with supervisors, team leaders or mentors to monitor and give feedback on individual performances and learning, and to decide upon and plan future learning activities. To fully implement the concept of the learning organisation, learning that may be relevant or of benefit to other individuals or to other units/ departments should

be shared. The use of technology will make this process easier and quicker once the mental hurdle of being prepared to share has been overcome.

Roles and responsibilities of the organisation

The knowledge and experience that individuals have about their roles and units/ departments, including what they know about other organisations, can be drawn upon and put to good use by contributing to the organisational vision, strategic objectives and tactical strategies.

Individuals should also be encouraged to challenge without fear, the retrogressive way of doing things. The organisation should be open to any suggested change or innovation, which can realistically be implemented.

To further strengthen this, continual open dialogue should take place between units within the organisation to exchange information and ideas and to provide opportunities for feedback. The success of this approach assumes that invisible barriers would have been broken down and that an open rapport has been established.

The work of civil society continues to become more complex. There are many learning curves ahead. As development issues become more interconnected and the civil society sector becomes more dynamic, the performance of CSOs would depend on their ability to continuously learn, unlearn and relearn.

IN A NUTSHELL:

"CSOs will need to respond in a timely and flexible way to social, technological, economic and political changes."

"Learning organisations recognise the need for change and actively pursue it."

"Organisations need to develop a new perspective on the way in which they work, their status, their working relationships and their openness. What this means is that, "they have to play an active role in adjusting their perspectives and actions in alignment to the organisational culture."

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Tip 6

How Sustainable is your Organisation?

A critical lesson I have learned working within the civil society sector in Africa is that the future is anything but certain. Many well-respected and seemingly resilient CSOs have found themselves on the financial ropes due to the turbulent resource domain and their inability to diversify their portfolios. 2014 was an interesting year for me because I had the opportunity to attend meetings where CSO sustainability was at the centre of discussions. At the end of that year, I attended an EU stakeholder workshop that sought to develop a country roadmap for engagement with civil society in Ghana from 2014-2019. At this meeting, civil society sustainability was a key discussion point.

Prior to 2014, the sustainability discourse has often found itself on the back burner. The absence of strategic frameworks to help structure civil society leaders' thinking and planning for sustainability has been a major setback.

Currently, if you operate a CSO or serve on its board, you will probably be wondering how you can contribute effectively to its sustainability within these difficult times. For a CSO to be sustainable there must be an appropriate alignment between its mission and resources. Almost all CSOs focus extensively on mission. It is rare for a CSO to focus on money and on a balance between the two.

Keys to a sustainable CSO

The first key is a strong mission. From a sustainability perspective having a strong mission means being one of the key providers of programmes and services in your community that people need, want and value.

The second key is secure funding sources. A sustainable CSO should have diversified funding sources and not be overly reliant on a single funder. Ideally, this means multiple types of fund-

ing. It is sustainable to have a single programme focus if multiple funding sources are available to support this programme. It is not sustainable to rely on a single programme and a single funder.

The third key is to institutionalise good internal governance practices. A sustainable CSO should institutionalise good internal governance practices including appropriate management controls, policies and procedures and staff accountability.

The fourth key is to focus on the numbers. In a sustainable CSO, the financial review should extend well beyond a quick look at the annual budget. Management and Board Members should be well versed in financial management and should be actively involved in reviewing and projecting the financial operations in the organisation.

The fifth key is surplus. Rather than focusing on merely balancing the budget each year, a sustainable CSO will plan for and generate a surplus annually. This surplus can provide cash, reserves and a "rainy day" fund when things become difficult. It can also be a source of funds to cultivate internal capacity within the organisation.

The sixth key is a contingency plan. A sustainable CSO actively plans to include this component looking at the threats to the organisation and subsequently planning to mitigate those threats. Simply put, be proactive! When negative things happen, the organisation has already thought about these threats and has planned to mitigate them.

The seventh key is to demonstrate long-term impact. CSOs need to collect baseline data to use as a reference to measure programme and project results. This enables CSOs to justify their relevance and showcase the value of their existence to their constituents, hence, justifying that they are indispensable for growth and development of society.

When you understand what it takes to be sustainable, you will be in a better position to know how well prepared your CSO is for survival. It is never too soon to evaluate the sustainability of your organisation.

Next step

The next step would be to conduct a sustainability assessment of your organisation.

A sustainability assessment includes:

- Review of the mission and programmes of the organisation;
- Review of the diversity and strength of the organisations funding sources;
- Review of the organisations management and governance practices;
- Financial review of the organisation including an analysis of the trends, surplus and reserves; and
- Identification of risks to the sustainability of the organisation.

IN A NUTSHELL:

The seven keys to a sustainable CSO are:

- *Strong Mission*
- *Secure Funding Sources*
- *Institutionalise Good Internal Governance Practices*
- *Focus on the numbers*
- *Surplus*
- *Contingency Plan*
- *Demonstrate Impact*

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Tip 7

Nurturing Human Resources

Human resource is your organisation's most essential asset. It is essential to pay attention to the importance of engaging and motivating your staff. The best part about working in the civil society sector is that you often work with highly self-motivated and passionate colleagues that approach their work as a "calling" instead of a career. However, many civil society actors are not remunerated commensurately in comparison with their counterparts in the private sector.

Indeed, because of this very reason, many concerns have been raised about retaining and maintaining staff within the sector due to the high rate of employee turnover. From my experience, the best way to respond to this concern is to first and foremost ensure that your team is committed to the organisation's mission.

The other most important element for engaging and motivating staff is to promote honest and open communication. The greatest challenge for most executive directors and leaders is that daily, they face the challenge of responding to different issues pulling them from different directions. Therefore, it becomes imperative that they are open and honest and consistently communicate to prevent misunderstanding among staff members about issues related to the organisation.

Effective communication plays a prominent role in developing long lasting staff motivation. One of many positive benefits gained from well established organisational communication is improved relationships.

Improving relationships between management and staff is very important and is often overlooked. Things will go smoothly when everyone is on the same page and understand the visionary goal the organisation is pursuing. The best process of communicating are well thought out emails that follow the chain of command and face-to-face interactions.

Staff should also be involved in the process of solving problems and responding to challenges. Staff members often have better ideas than executive directors and leaders. Staff members who are given responsibility for and control over their work feel a greater commitment to ensuring that they work efficiently. Staff members should be given the freedom to make decisions and to tackle problems without constantly having to get agreement from the executive director or supervisor.

Some executive directors and supervisors feel that this lessens their control over staff and their work. From my experience, less control needs to be exercised when staff members are committed to their work. This must also be supported by a clarity of roles and responsibilities which are critical for good work practices. The involvement of staff in the problem-solving process is a powerful way of building ownership and consensus.

It is also important for your organisation to institutionalise alternative benefits. For example, allowing staff to work from home one day a week, casual wear Fridays, closing early on Friday's, organisational birthday celebrations and staff relaxation events popularly known as "happy hour".

Empowering staff to complete key objectives is an effective way of motivating them. An example is providing staff the opportunities to chair staff and other project related meetings. Often executive directors give their staff tasks and then by their own actions take away the power from them to fulfill them. Micromanaging staff is so easy to do when you have so much to do with little resources. Executive directors should be conscious about this and refrain from micromanaging.

To feel empowered, staff members must have a sense of self-determination, competence, meaning and influence. A sense of meaning in a staff members work refers to the extent to which they believe that their work affects the lives of oth-

ers either directly or indirectly. As long as staff members perceive that doing their job satisfies important needs of internal or external stakeholders, they will see the significance of their work. In addition, staff members must feel like they are able to influence people and events in important ways in order to feel empowered.

Another critical element is for executive directors and leaders of CSOs to create a team environment. This involves combining soft skills and technical competencies to develop creative and innovative ways of moving the organisation forward. Staff members want to feel that they are doing a good job as members of a team. The best way to promote teamwork is to treat all your staff as valued members of the team. In addition, getting things done and seeing things being done motivates team members. Equally if something has been agreed but is not put into action, this can be discouraging. Sometimes delays or difficulties are inevitable, in which case it is important to provide feedback. Without feedback people become confused, then frustrated when they do not see changes that have been promised.

As a leader you also have the ultimate responsibility to provide forewarnings for changes. Typically, human beings resist change. Therefore, in order to facilitate your staff's apprehension to engaging change, the best strategic action you should take is to communicate the proposed change.

It is important that you communicate the reason for the change and let them be involved in making the change happen. It is also important to empower them to do the work. These simple steps would enrich your change process and produce sustainable value-added dividends.

IN A NUTSHELL:

"The best way to retain and maintain staff is to first and foremost ensure that your team is committed to the organisation's mission"

"The other most important element for engaging and motivating staff is to promote honest and open communication. "

"Things will go smoothly when everyone is on the same page and understand the visionary goal the organisation is pursuing"

"As long as staff members perceive that doing their job satisfies important needs of internal or external stakeholders, they will see the significance of their work."

WACSI EDITORIAL

10 SOCIAL IMPACT TIPS FOR START-UP CSOs

BY CHARLES KOJO VANDYCK

Tip 8

Why Branding Matters

The last couple of years, my colleagues and I at WACSI have initiated passionate discussions about branding within a civil society context and its value addition to strengthening the institute's relevance, identity, cohesion and capacity. We have shared a lot of ideas about this intriguing subject and some of us associated it with only for-profit businesses.

From our discussions, it is apparent that many of the successful CSOs we are associated with continue to use their brands primarily as a fundraising and mobilisation tool. However, we also recognise that it is important for CSOs to develop a broader and more strategic approach, managing their brands to create greater social impact and resilient organisational cohesion.

We have become truly passionate about branding because we strongly believe that CSOs especially community based organisations (CBOs) can benefit from having strong brands. This can help them to tell their stories so that development partners support their organisations in a sustainable manner. An investment in branding can also stimulate a sense of involvement and trust from the general public and the civil society sector and that is beneficial to all of us.

In contemporary African societies, brands have played an important role. There has been a proliferation of choices and brands, which influences the specific choices of consumers.

For example, when you purchase a product and you like it and go back and buy it again, the brand is the way for you to know that you are getting the same quality and experience you would expect from that product.

The same example should be applied to your CSO where the idea is to create a compelling attraction for development partners to support your organisation's vision, programmes and interventions.

The basic premise for creating a strong CSO brand is your ability to express your message so that the community the organisation serves and other stakeholders can understand what you do and why you do it effectively. Therefore, within the civil society sector, branding may be defined as the capacity of an organisation to educate and create emotional value that attracts loyal supporters and advocates to their cause(s). Branding may also be described as telling your story to your audience and showing why the work your organisation does matters.

So, what are the benefits of having a strong brand?

Strong brands articulate your message, so people understand your mission: This is extremely important because most CSOs emphasise their mission and not specifically the impact they have achieved which is what donors want to see, the ultimate results of the problem that you are solving.

Strong brands raise the level of professionalism and ensure consistency: This means that your organisation's newsletters, annual reports, brochures, programmes and how you use social media should reflect a consistency in the values and brand personality you are expressing. This helps to establish rapport with partners your peers and beneficiaries and makes a connection that is immediate and impactful. However, if you put out messages that are inconsistent it makes your organisation look unprofessional and unorganised. This is something you would want to avoid.

Strong brands distinguish you from other organisations: For example, in Ghana there are over 6500 registered CSOs, therefore, it is important to distinguish your organisation so that people know your uniqueness. This should be reflected in your service, the population you serve, the impact you achieve, and the way you go about delivering your service and your philosophy. Any

of these measures can be differentiators that can help people understand what you are doing differently, why you exist and why they need to support you.

Strong brands position your organisation as a leader in its field: It is important that your organisation is at the forefront of the specific work you do. As funding is being refined, the organisations that are going to be supported are the ones that have a leadership position in their sector. A strong brand can help you project the quality of your leadership.

Strong brands foster repeat business and referrals: A strong brand would enable your organisation to be highly recommended for partnerships and would also ensure that existing partnerships are sustained.

Strong brands save money by streamlining activities and processes: Organisations with strong brands have developed and invested in systems and processes that enable them to produce tools and materials in a cost-effective manner. They are cost-conscious and continuously seek to be prudent without sacrificing quality.

Strong brands utilise technology effectively: Through your website, email and social media, an organisation should communicate to their development partners, establish a rapport and appeal to the specific target audiences that are relevant for their work. Organisations should also explore using technology that improves the efficiency and effectiveness of their operational and programme delivery.

Strong brands provide a strong foundation for growth: A CSO with a strong brand is poised for growth. Having a strong message, visual identity, and tools to communicate compellingly allows you to have brand advocates that support you in telling your story and facilitates your ability to be innovative and future oriented.

Every CSO is a community resource and its products and/or services reflect the organisation's brand identity. Therefore, CSO branding is being conscious of the continual nature of deliberately of responding to community needs.

A lot of start-up CSOs make the mistake of thinking their cause will market itself. Unfortunately, it takes a lot more planning than that. There's a lot that goes into a strong marketing strategy like content marketing, advertisements, and social media campaigns. Basic steps that can be taken is to (1) Optimise your website with search engine optimisation (SEO) so more consumers can find you in their search results, (2) Write blog posts that reflect your brand messaging and that are easy to share on social media. Most importantly, interact with your audience. Start a conversation around your cause and educate people about why it is important.

IN A NUTSHELL:

"An investment in branding can also stimulate a sense of involvement and trust from the general public and the civil society sector"

"A CSO with a strong brand is poised for growth. Having a strong message, visual identity, and tools to communicate compellingly allows you to have brand advocates that support you in telling your story and facilitates your ability to be innovative and future oriented."

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Tip 9

Results Planning

Many of us who are engaged in development work always feel that there aren't enough hours in a day. That will probably be true if you do not plan to achieve results. I would like to share a tool known, as results planning which I believe will help improve your effectiveness, productivity and minimise distractions.

If you want to achieve more in any given time span, stop and reflect on what you're doing. The chances are that you suffer from interruptions, a lack of planning and jumbled priorities.

The first question you should seek, and answer is:

What am I doing?

Are you engaged in busyness or business? I am sure you often get caught up in completing tasks that you have documented in a to-do list or checklist. I am not saying that to-do lists are not useful. However, it is critical for you to ask yourself the following questions "What am I doing? Are the tasks I am undertaking leading to the desired result? Am I approaching my tasks in a creative manner?

You should be more focused on the result you seek to achieve than the perceived activities that you hope will take you there. Getting a clearer picture of the end game will help you focus on what is most important. It is essential that you utilise an approach that can bring your ideas into reality. It is imperative you clearly understand your community's needs, focus on developing breakthrough ideas, develop various potential solutions and tell your story to inspire others toward action. We operate in an ocean of demand. Donors and development partners are demanding value for money and our beneficiaries are also expecting us to be more responsive and empowering. Therefore, CSOs do not have the luxury of focusing on activities at the expense of results.

The demands on us are always increasing. The more we achieve the more the demands increase. My favorite primary school teacher used to say, the price for achieving results is even more sleepless nights.

Another issue you will need to consider is:

Activity vs. Productivity

According to Peter Drucker, "Productivity for the knowledge worker means the ability to get the right things done. It means effectiveness". Knowledge work is defined by its results. "As development workers it is imperative for us to distinguish activity from productivity. We should not confuse activity with achievement. Activity is not the same as productivity. Productivity is results-oriented activity".

Random activities may not be productive especially if they are not linked to your desired results. You can complete thousands of tasks but if they do not serve your goal, they will become distractions. The lesson here is to keep your eyes on the results. In development circles, this means envisioning a programme or project's desired outputs, outcomes and impact.

The three questions

Results planning requires you to answer these three questions.

What is your end picture?

What will the programme or project look like when it's done? This means you have to spend time envisioning the big picture instead of jumping into an endless series of to dos.

What are the necessary conditions to realise your end picture?

A flower blooms under suitable conditions: a delicate balance of water, nutrients and sunlight.

It is your responsibility to determine the conditions that need to be in place for the end picture to come into full bloom. Brainstorm and strategically analyse the problem while keeping the result firmly in mind.

What results-driven activities are needed to satisfy each condition?

Instead of asking, what do I need to do next? Ask, what is the result I'm after? Programme and project activities should move you closer to achieving your end picture. If it's not, stop doing it and change your direction. Results planning helps you stay focused on what's most important. It will also help you make smarter, quicker, clear and focused decisions.

Successful change begins with results

The key to the successful implementation of projects and programmes is to focus on producing measurable and impactful results. Programmes and projects are easily derailed when the focus is activity centered. Too often the focus of the programming of CSOs and development institutions are centered on activities rather than results, and the end becomes confused with the means, or, processes with outcomes.

Results planning should produce quick measurable gains. Accountable leaders or managers are responsible for producing results, whether being measurable improvement in performance or lessons learned. To achieve results through planning, set specific, measurable improvement goals and match resources, tools, and action plans to the requirements of accomplishing success.

IN A NUTSHELL:

"Getting a clearer picture of the end game will help you focus on what is most important."

"Random activities may not be productive especially if they are not linked to your desired results."

"Instead of asking, what do I need to do next? Ask, what is the result I'm after?"

"The key to the successful implementation of projects and programmes is to focus on producing measurable and impactful results."

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Tip 10

Communicating Results

A colleague of mine always says, “You cannot not communicate”. I have found this to be so true within the development sector. Communication is an essential tool that enhances the growth and development of every organisation. It is a means used in achieving the goals and objectives of the organisation.

Communicating results for CSOs involves media institutions, CSOs, and the publics. Communication encompasses the creation, distribution, control, use, and processing of information as a resource of knowledge whether for governments, organisations, groups, or individuals. Such knowledge makes decisions regarding message shaping and targeting to maximise desired impact while minimizing undesired collateral efforts.

Communication is a very positive tool that boosts the work in CSOs. It is also an effective means for CSOs to meet the information needs and expectations of beneficiaries and donors respectively. In doing so, it is important for organisations, to equally focus on communication that relates directly to the various stakeholders of the organisation; i.e. staff, volunteers, beneficiaries, donors, management among others.

Communication strategies of an organisation should conform to and help achieve the mission, vision and objectives of the organisation. This is because communication serves to an expected end and not the end itself.

In recent times, the utilisation of new and traditional media allows organisations to develop communication strategies that leverage on both parties’ strengths to create a buzz and sustainable engagement. Such an approach to communications is incredibly powerful and cost effective.

It is essential that organisations understand the advantages of the two communication models. These models are powerful methods of persua-

sion, marketing and branding that can effectively influence the impact of your programmes.

Amplifying the impact of your interventions is essential as your organisation continues to engage with existing donors, potential donors, public institutions, policy makers, government officials and all programme stakeholders and beneficiaries.

In communicating the achievements and challenges of your programmes and projects, you will have to focus on your ability to:

- Promote knowledge sharing on the methodology adopted in your activities and to inform your target audience and beneficiaries of your services and activities;
- Influence decisions of government, policy makers thereby maintaining a good corporate image in the eyes of a range of stakeholders such as donors, partners, clients and targeted audience;
- Publicise your organisations achievements and successes in a compelling and convincing manner with all stakeholders;
- Obtain feedback from your work and remain relevant to donors and most importantly your project partners; and
- Pull stakeholder’s attention to the challenges in society you are working to address.

An organisation’s communication drive should be clearly articulated and documented into a well-defined strategy. This helps an organisation to share information with specific target audiences with the prime goal of achieving the overall objective. The framework helps the organisation to achieve its set objectives and respond to the communication needs of its stakeholders and other beneficiaries.

The key components of a communication strategy are the communication goals, audience, message, tools, expected outcomes, timeframe and evaluation plan.

The communication goals constitute a set of feasible and measurable targets an organisation seeks to realise through its communications over a specified period of time. If well defined, they will enable the organisation to be clear on what they want to communicate and what they want to achieve by communicating strategically.

The audience comprises of the persons you share information about your products and services. The audience should be categorised into internal and external stakeholders to enable the organisation to strategically and effectively reach out to them.

Another key component is the message. This is the information that you will be sharing with the identified stakeholders. This should be specific and clearly defined.

The tools are also an essential aspect. These are the means and channels to be used to convey the intended information to stakeholders or receive information from them. The identified tools for the specific stakeholders must be accessible and user-friendly to the targeted audience. Commonly used tools include websites, Facebook, Twitter,

A strategy should also include the expected outcomes. These are milestones organisation's seek to achieve as they communicate with their stakeholders. These could be the possible behavior change expected of the target audience by the organization. Explicitly stating the expected outcomes of the strategy helps to measure the level of success achieved in the communication efforts of the organisation.

Stating the timeframe is also critical. It is important that the strategy states the timeline for every communication action. By stating this, it will help the organisation to know what to expect what to do at a given time.

A strategy should also contain an evaluation plan. This section analyses what you have achieved, and the success factors and challenges identified and or encountered in the process. This will help organisations analyse the possible challenges it faces in order to devise mitigation plans to overcome them in the future. The evaluation plan helps to develop a more realistic and effective communication plan.

It is important to emphasise on achieving a visible balance between strategy and delivery. A well-articulated strategy comes to life when it is executed with precision and finesse. Therefore, communication efforts should balance content and aesthetics. Carefully designed communication materials are essential to enticing potential clients to commit to an initiative or a specific development agenda. Premium must be put on anything that acts as an impression including websites, social media, newsletters, presentation and marketing materials, e-mails, business cards, networking, and policy conversations. Poorly presented ideas and stories destroys the impact of your social change initiative.

The most effective social change stories communicated through a powerful combination of visual, verbal, literal, and visceral content that articulates a focused and compelling multisensory message. How one appears conveys just as much as what one says.

IN A NUTSHELL:

"Amplifying the impact of your interventions is essential as your organisation continues to engage with existing donors, potential donors, public institutions, policy makers, government officials and all programme stakeholders and beneficiaries."

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

The State of Civil Society Sustainability in Ghana

<https://wacsi.org/admin/research/uploads/The%20State%20of%20Civil%20Society%20Organisations%20Sustainability%20in%20Ghana.pdf>

Guidebook on Alternatives Funding Models for Civil Society Organisations in Africa

<https://wacsi.org/admin/research/uploads/Guidebook%20on%20Alternative%20Funding%20Models%20for%20Civil%20Society%20Organisations%20in%20Africa%20N.pdf>

4 Common Reasons why CSOs Struggle with M&E

https://wacsi.org/resources/oped_detail.php?id=7

Technology and Information System for CSOs

https://wacsi.org/resources/issue_detail.php?id=15

Enhancing Digital Security Awareness for CSOs in Africa

https://wacsi.org/resources/oped_detail.php?id=12

Interrogating Governance and Leadership Succession Planning in Selected Civil Society Organisations in Ghana

<https://wacsi.org/admin/research/uploads/Governance%20and%20Leadership%20Succession%20in%20Ghana%20-%20SAvbg.pdf>

KEY LEARNING POINTS

Kindly note down your key learning points and how you intend to apply them in your CSO. For more assistance during the implementation, you can reach out to WACSI at info@wacsi.org.

TIP 1:

TIP 2:

TIP 3:


TIP 4:

TIP 5:

TIP 6:



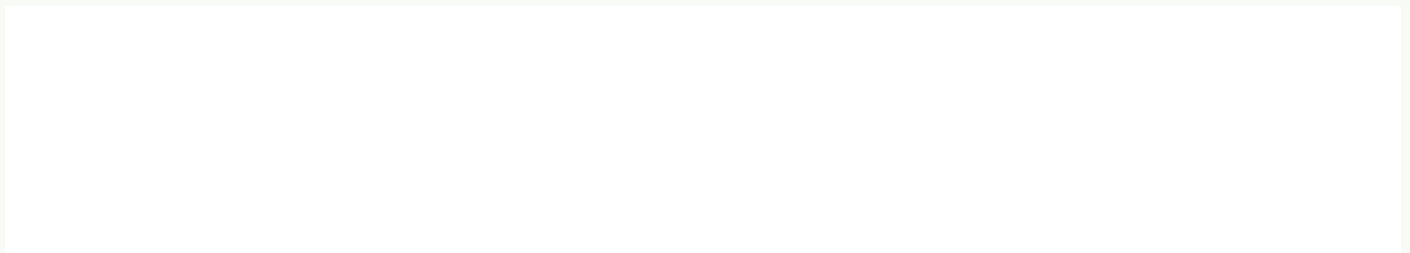
TIP 7:



TIP 8:



TIP 9:



TIP 10:



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10 SOCIAL IMPACT TIPS FOR START-UP CSOs

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